CHRISTIAN ACTION IN SOCIETY

I

THE RESPONSIBLE SOCIETY

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PREFACE

The Study Department Committee of the World Council of Churches at its meeting last summer chose the subject of CHRISTIAN ACTION IN SOCIETY as one of the enquiries which it will pursue during the coming year. The topic has been divided under two headings: *The Responsible Society* and *The Meaning of Work*, in order to place emphasis on both those problems which arise in the political and social decisions of nations, and those which arise in the daily life of Christians*.

This statement on *The Responsible Society* is not an official statement of the World Council of Churches. It is an attempt to interpret the problems confronting the Church today in the light of the Amsterdam report on *The Disorder of Society*. It expresses the general consensus which was reached by an Ecumenical Study Conference of the World Council's Study Department meeting at Wadham College, Oxford, England, during the summer of 1949.

There is another characteristic of this statement which ought to be mentioned at the outset. It is intended to be an ecumenical document and therefore it was planned and written, so that all those who are a part of the World Council community might feel that what is said is relevant, regardless of their different perspective. Consequently the statement does not deal primarily with specific political issues nor with questions about the structural outline of

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* Those who have not already done so should read the earlier report on plans and purposes of the enquiry contained in the pamphlet *Christian Action in Society*. (See back cover for list of Study Department publications.) This pamphlet includes a list of questions for discussion by groups studying the theme of *The Responsible Society*.

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the Responsible Society. Rather, it is concerned with the more general principles which underlie a responsible society, and upon which there has already developed some substantial Christian consensus. These principles are examined in terms of two problems, which especially seem to demand attention today, because everywhere Christians are being asked to give their views on them : the problem of economic justice and freedom, and the problems presented by the conflict between the Communist and the non-Communist nations.

It is the expectation of the Study Department that Christian study groups and forums, by using this statement, will be able to push toward more substantial agreement about the specific actions and concrete decisions which must be forthcoming, if the Church's witness is to be made effective in the world.

An excerpt from the Amsterdam Assembly Report of Section III is printed in an appendix to this pamphlet.

The Responsible Society

I. THE RESPONSIBLE SOCIETY AS A POSITIVE GOAL

> *« A Responsible Society is one where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order, and where those who hold polittical authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and the people whose welfare is affected by it. »*
>
> Report of Section III, Amsterdam Assembly, 1948.

The Responsible Society is both a political and an economic ideal. It has to be stated in general terms in any ecumenical document, because approaches to the Responsible Society must vary enormously from country to country, depending on the economic and political circumstances. In ecumenical circles there has been some use of the words « the third way » to suggest this same goal. However, it is too negative, for its suggests no more than opposition to a first and a second way. The term « The Responsible Society », because it is not yet familiar, can be given the right content.

The conception of the Responsible Society as the objective for Christians is based upon the assumption that no known economic and political system serves all the values which have a compelling claim upon Christians in society. These values — especially the values of productivity, justice and freedom — should always be kept in close relation to the more distinctively Christian goal of a society that is open to the transforming gifts of grace, especially the gift of compassion.

The economic systems which have familiar labels (Capitalism, Socialism, Communism) in their more consistent forms are inadequate as objectives for Christians. Both Communism and Socialism are based on too optimistic a view of man as he is expected to be when be is delivered from the burdens and temptations associated with private property in the means of production. Capitalism is also

mistaken in its optimism, because it assumes that the self-interest which it regards as the mainspring of the economic system is necessarily constructive, and will fit into an ultimate harmony of interests. Defenders of Capitalism have failed to take account of the anti-social effects of uncontrolled profit-seeking or of the effects upon personal character of a society which in its economic activities appeals primarily to the self-interest of its members. All of these systems have had too simple conceptions concerning human motives in society.

These systems in their consistent forms are one-sided in relation to the basic problem of finding the right balance between planning and freedom, between centralisation and the emphasis upon the initiative of many different units in society, individuals, small communites, voluntary associations, etc. Every industrial nation, whatever the theories that are dominant among its citizens, has been forced to act through government to prevent such social catastrophes as mass unemployment. The anarchy of an individualistic Capitalism can no longer be tolerated, and even capitalistic nations have accepted a considerable measure of economic planning under the auspices of government. On the other hand a consistent collectivism overlooks the threat to political and spiritual freedom, when planning develops toward its own logical limit. The Amsterdam report summarizes the dilemmas that every industrial society now faces in the following words :

> « Coherent and purposeful ordering of society has now become a major necessity. Here governments have responsibilities which they must not shirk. But centres of initiative in economic life must be so encouraged as to avoid placing too great a burden upon centralized judgment and decision. »

The Responsible Society would be one in which the initiative and participation of the person, of the family, of small groups and communities are encouraged. In an economy and a culture in which the line of least resistance is the trend toward bigness, toward more and more centralized control, there is a special obligation to correct that trend, so that persons may learn to act responsibly instead of becoming puppets of a distant bureaucracy.

The size of cities and of the organizational units in which men work needs special examination. Those nations which have to make fresh decisions as they rebuild their destroyed cities should look to the spiritual and cultural and social consequences of size in this work of rebuilding. There is no Christian law in regard to this matter of size. The one important thing is to be free from the assumption that is so natural for many people in our time : that the bigger must be the better.

The Responsible Society calls not only a new combination of economic and political procedures (new in contrast to both a consistent Capitalism or a consistent Socialism or Communism), but also for a new spirit, a new sense of the values that are important. There is hope for the development of a responsible society where two convictions are held with equal force : first, that freedom lacks substance unless it is combined with economic justice and, second, that the quest for economic justice leads to new forms of oppression unless it is united with an insistent concern for political and spiritual freedom.

Two approaches to the Responsible Society in our day

Two tendencies which are quite widespread in the contemporary world represent approaches to the Responsible Society.

The first is the tendency to prefer an experimental method which makes use of elements in various systems rather than accepting any system as absolute. This tendency is evident in nations which think of themselves as following a pattern of democratic socialism. What they have really achieved is a mixture of institutions and methods different from both doctrinaire Socialism and doctrinaire Capitalism. There is, in these countries, very little faith in any overall economic panacea. Problems of incentive, problems of efficiency, problems of power, appear in new forms and have to be dealt with from day to day by methods which fit none of the usual economic stereotypes.

In the one remaining large centre of Capitalism, the United States, in this respect the situation is less different

from that in the partly-socialistic countries than is usually believed. There is a split in the American consciousness between the individualistic ideals and theories which are widely praised and actual economic practices. Since 1929 there has been a gradual revolution in economic institutions, even in the working assumptions of the people. There is a vast body of social legislation which no major political party would dare repeal. It is now taken for granted that the national government must assume responsibility to prevent a recurrence of mass unemployment. Labour now has great economic and political power. To be sure, a large part of the business community reflected in the press and other organs of opinion hopes to reverse this trend and keeps alive the theories and slogans of a purer Capitalism. But, whatever modifications of this trend may prove morally or politically possible, they are likely to illustrate the same general tendency to avoid absolute systems or panaceas.

The Responsible Society is not another system. It points to a society which accepts the fact of a deep tension between justice and freedom, a tension that will always force men to break through the stereotypes which are formed by history, and to seek new and fresh solutions.

It is possible that other centuries than ours will find it easier to state what social structure corresponds with the conception of a responsible society. To day we are in the midst of a long and painful process of adaptation to a new equilibrium in world economy, political structure and social relations. Under such circumstances peoples and groups tend to disagree vehemently about the characteristics of a responsible society. Even more difficult is the fact that economic and social aims of a vital character, which appear to be the necessary elements of any responsible society of today, are mutually contradictory. Such modern incarnations of justice and freedom as social security, full employment, free trade and enterprise, equilibrium in balances of payment, economic and social development of backward peoples, etc., cannot easily be woven into one pattern. A period in which we must stumble from emergency to emergency is not favourable for the elaboration of an ideal social structure of society. Any identification with

simple solutions or historical stereotypes will certainly not lead to a balance of justice and freedom. Governments. groups and individuals are constantly being forced into a revision of their policies and a choice of priorities. Therefore, the approach toward a responsible society is bound to be largely experimental. There is no escape from this judgment.

The concept of the constitutional state

The second tendency that represents an approach to the Responsible Society is seen in political institutions which, in the words of the Amsterdam report (Section III) enable people «to control, to criticize and to change their governments» and which guard freedom of mind and conscience for individuals and for minorities. One essential aspect of the Responsible Society is spiritual and cultural freedom for persons. This is not real unless it takes the form of freedom for minorities, for the adherents of unpopular causes, for the lonely prophet or pioneer. Such freedom depends upon constitutional limitation of the power of those in authority through the rule of law. Religious freedom is basic. It is threatened in some circumstances by political authorities that seek to use churches for their own ends, and in other circumstances by churches that seek to preserve a religious monopoly for themselves.

There has been great ambiguity in Christian teaching about political systems, but today it is clear that the Church has a stake in the development or preservation of a society that is open to criticism from within, that places limits on power, that defends the rights of minorities to organise to become majorities, that guards the freedom of persons to be loyal to conscience and to witness to the truth as they see it, without fear of arbitrary punishment. That society may be called by any name or label ; it is one which Christians should seek to win or preserve for men everywhere. This type of society is the opposite of totalitarianism, the great political sickness that threatens in varying degrees all nations. It threatens them in many different ways, for the technical

instruments of power that make totalitarian tyranny possible are now the common property of all technological societies, and the temptation to use them will always be strong when a community faces a crisis caused by social conflicts, economic breakdown, or deep fear among the people.

No one of the national communities which have inherited institutions of political and cultural freedom is free from great wrongs, but in many of them there is at least the opportunity for citizens to criticise these wrongs and to organise to correct them. This capacity for continuous correction does exist in these communities, and where it exists the institutions of freedom are not to be dismissed as facades for an oppressive capitalism or imperialism.

There is an understandable tendency to regard them as facades for imperialism and to assume that they represent deep hypocrisy, because they are so often combined with racial prejudice and discrimination. The racial pride of white people of the west in their relations with the coloured races has naturally enough aroused deep resentments ; but the whole world will lose if the experience of nations which have won for themselves political and cultural freedom is disregarded because of justifiable resentments.

There are those who say that the institutions of political and cultural freedom are desirable, but that for some nations in the throes of revolution they are a luxury ; that order, maintained by dictatorships, if necessary, is the first requirement. The theory of Communism provides for just such an interim dictatorship, that is expected to make itself unnecessary. The greatest miscalculation made by Communism and one that has led to profound disillusionment has been this expectation, that the state as a coercive power will wither away. It should be admitted that no abstract conception of a constitutional state can be imposed on a nation that has had no spiritual preparation for it, or which is on the edge of anarchy or civil war. Churches will not help people who live under such conditions by merely holding up the ideal of the fully responsible society. And yet, in those situations it is important for Christians to avoid the illusion that a

new birth of freedom will necessarily come as a by-product of revolution, or that tyrants will, of their own volition, render themselves dispensable. The struggle for political and spiritual freedom may be a long and hard one, but it is one that must engage the loyalty of Christians and the support of churches. The churches moved by concern to safeguard the rights of all men should work directly to win or safeguard the conditions of civil and spiritual freedom in the community at large. At the same time when they struggle to win or safeguard their own freedom to witness to the whole Gospel of Christ because loyalty to that Gospel requires it, they find themselves making an indirect contribution to the cause of that wider civil and spiritual freedom.

Faith as the source of responsible action

The establishment, preservation, or improvement of a «responsible society» is, however, not chiefly a matter of having the right institutional forms, the right constitution, or the right policy. Nor should defence against communism as an external threat or the fight against ruthless capitalism and imperialism be the major interest of the churches. Emphasis on the deeper roots of responsible living and upon the specific threats to those roots in a technological and hedonistic mass-society and in the destruction of genuine community life in our great industrial cities is of central importance. The spirit and consequently the very existence of a responsible society depends upon faith among the people. Faith is the only source of responsible action which does not dry up in the face of guilt and the inescapable consequences of established fact, since it does not spring from human vitality but from the grace of God Himself. Where man knows to Whom he is responsible even in the grip of circumstances not of his own making, he is able to take responsible action. He will enjoy the freedom of the children of God even when such circumstances leave him but little choice. A responsible society depends basically upon this freedom which breaks the chains forged by history. This does not lead to miraculous or conspicuous events and does not change

easily the face of the globe. But it is the means by which the world is kept under the grace of God, without which society would already long ago have fallen into the last consequences of its irresponsibility.

In the western democracies many high-minded secularists assume that democracy itself is a sufficient object of faith, but to make a specific type of society its own absolute end is to destroy it. Unless a large part of the citizenry is made up of responsible persons who look to the rule of God above their society and their own life, we can expect one of two results. Either society will make an idol of itself, and that is one road to totalitarianism ; or society will disintegrate because of group conflicts within it, and that is another road to totalitarianism as a desperate remedy for chaos. So, the fate of any existing, if imperfect, embodiments of the responsible society depends more upon what happens in the souls of citizens than it does on protection against any external threat of totalitarianism. Responsible society will last only when responsibility is being learned in the practice of true religious faith.

II. THE RESPONSIBLE SOCIETY AND THE CONFLICT OF SYSTEMS

So far the discussion has emphasised the Responsible Society as a positive goal. Today the dominant fact is the conflict which divides the world between adherents of social systems and ideologies. This conflict creates urgent problems for the World Council of Churches and for churches and Christian citizens everywhere. In some situations, concern about the immediate issues which arise from this conflict takes precedence over all long-term thinking and discussion about ultimate goals. However, any sound dealing with those immediate issues presupposes convictions about the kind of society for which Christians should work and pray. Attention will now be directed toward these immediate issues.

The report of Section III of the Amsterdam Assembly is the best place from which to begin, because it provides the most adequate collective Christian guidance to which

churches can appeal, as they face the present conflict of systems. This report is clear in rejecting the ideology of Communism, particularly its idolatry, its false promise of redemption, and its ruthless totalitarianism, but it also lays the foundation for a constructive approach to the people who are attracted by Communism. It is clear in rejecting the reactionary type of economic opposition to Communism which, in most of the world, is associated with Capitalism as a symbol, and it marks out an approach which is easily distinguishable from the self-righteous « holy war » against Communism which is being waged by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. It neither fully sanctions nor fully rejects any existing economic system as such, but points to « The Responsible Society » as a new way.

The report has met with the strongest criticism from two sources : from the conservative spokesmen for Capitalism in the United States and Switzerland, and from the propaganda authorities in the Soviet Union. The Monthly Letter of the National City Bank in New York City and the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate criticise the report for opposite reasons.

At two points the criticisms of the report are based in part on misunderstanding, due to inadequacies of statement.

(1) The first is lack of clarity in the way in which the report deals with Capitalism. The barrage of criticism in some quarters was greater than it might have been because of this lack of clarity, though it is evident that any criticism of Capitalism would have been widely resented. The most controversial sentence that came out of Amsterdam was the sentence in which the report says, that the Christian churches « should reject the ideologies of both Communism and *laissez-faire* Capitalism ». There are many people who insist that because Capitalism does not carry with it a total philosophy of life, it has no ideology. The report stated explicitly the content of the capitalistic ideology. It is the false promise that « justice will follow as a by-product of free enterprise ». Those who say that the addition of the words « *laissez-faire* » rendered the

report innocuous, proved to be mistaken, because this seemed to do little to temper the conservative criticism of it. Even though *laissez-faire* Capitalism may be dead as a type of institution, it still exists in the minds and, we may even say, in the hearts, of many adherents of « free enterprise » as an ideology — who believe in it as a system of ideas.

It is assumed here that the report was sound in intention and that the criticism of it was more widespread than it needed to be because the report did not make clear that in attacking the ideology of *laissez-faire* Capitalism it was not suggesting either that the very fluid economic institutions of Capitalism should be fully refjected, or that Capitalism has an ideology which is a total view of life and therefore incompatible with Christianity on as many levels as the ideology of Communism. These conservative criticisms of the report are in one respect a good sign, because they show that the report has an edge and deals rigorously with the temptations of Christians on both sides of the so-called « iron curtain ».

(2) The report over-simplified the world's major political conflict, by seeming to identify one side with Communism and the other side with Capitalism. As a matter of fact, the conflict between Communists and Socialists is as acute as that between Communists and Capitalists, often more so, because they know more about each other from actual experience. They are more bitter rivals because they propose solutions for the same problems. Also, there is a conflict between the uncritical defenders of free enterprise and the various forms of democratic socialism which have developed in Western Europe.

Convictions about Communism within the World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches today, in the life of its member-churches, actually transcends the present political conflict. Churches in several countries in the Communist orbit in Eastern Europe, notably in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, are active members of the World Council, and the church in the part of China controlled by the

Communists is in a similar situation. It is to be expected that, within the constituency of the World Council, there will be quite different views concerning the attitude which Christians should take toward Communism.

The conviction that is most widely held among the member-churches is that Communism as a movement which has its base in the Soviet Union, and through Communist parties is seeking to extend its power throughout the world, should be resisted both politically and spiritually, and that the churches in the countries associated with « western democracy » should give moral support to their governments in their efforts to check the extension of Communist power. In the United States, the churches have continually stressed the importance of constructive resistance by such methods as the European Recovery Program, but have opposed the tendency to emphasise the military factor in resistance. Yet, except for a small minority of pacifists, the American churches have accepted the fact that there is a necessary military factor in this resistance. There is a general recognition among Christians in the United States that a third world war could not be expected to defeat Communism, whatever effect it might have on the Soviet Union. Such a war in its destructiveness would not serve the cause of freedom, but would be more likely to create favourable conditions for totalitarianism of some kind.

There is also in the World Council constituency, especially in countries which are in the Communist orbit, a more favourable attitude towards Communism. This point of view combines rejection of Communism as a faith and an ideology with limited cooperation with Communism on the social and economic level. It involves a tendency to share the Communist criticism of the bourgeois west, especially in so far as the west is identified with Capitalism. Feudalism may often be the real enemy rather than Capitalism, but it is feudalism seen against the background of what is interpreted as the propping up of feudalism by capitalistic power. Those Christians who hold this general point of view can say, with full honesty, that they regard Communism as the best, or the least evil, possibility which their country faces.

What should be the attitude of Christians holding these very different views of Communism and living in different circumstances, toward each other's policies ?

A suggested ecumenical approach

This is one of the most difficult questions in the life of the World Council of Churches at present. Considerations on which an answer should be based are suggested in what follows. It is assumed that Communism as a faith and an ideology must be resisted spiritually by Christians under all circumstances, and that the extension of Communist power must be resisted politically wherever there is a constructive alternative.

There are situations in which Christians believe that there is now no viable alternative to Communism for their country and that it is right for them to give critical support to a Communist regime or to a Communist movement. Their decision should be understood and respected by Christians in countries which are strongly opposed to Communism. Christians who do cooperate with Communist regimes or Communist movements may help to keep the Church from being identified with reactionary forces and they may keep open channels between the Church and the people who are strongly attracted by Communism because they believe that it will deliver them from particular burdens. It must be remembered that thoroughly convinced Communists who have accepted the full Communist teaching as gospel or dogma are everywhere a small minority. Most of the people who support Communism do so because of specific grievances and because it seems to be the only movement that is radical enough to give them a new start. The Church should not allow a chasm to develop between itself and these people.

Christians who believe that it is their obligation to give such support to Communism in particular situations in which no better alternative seems to be available should remain aware that they may be used as a front for Communist purposes which they do not share, and that it may become increasingly difficult for them to preserve a distinctively Christian basis for action. Christians who right-

ly see ground for the Communist attack upon churches in the churches' neglect of the claim of social justice will be tempted to adjust Christianity to Communism in such a way as to produce an eclectic distortion of both. They may find themselves repeating Communist slogans and propaganda as though they were Christian teaching. The stronger the hold that any branch of the Church has upon the biblical and theological foundations of its faith, the better able it will be to learn from Communism without diluting its own message.

Christians and churches in countries which do have a constructive alternative to Communism should not allow a sympathetic judgment towards Christians in other circumstances, who maintain a critical support of Communism, to undercut their own political resistance to the extension of Communist power wherever such an alternative exists. Christians and churches in countries controlled by Communist governments and who for good reasons give critical support to their governments will have a better chance in the long run to resist or overcome Communist totalitarianism in their own countries if the institutions of political and spiritual freedom continue to exist in other nations. The whole ecumenical community, whatever differences there may be among its members about policies in particular nations, should recognise that it has a responsibility to do what is possible to prevent the world from coming under Communist domination*.

Christians in Europe and America should understand how far institutions which to them represent political freedom are associated with imperialism and racial dis-

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* The question about Capitalist domination is naturally raised at this point. The following considerations are pertinent: today Capitalism is on the defensive. In the present political conflict with Communism, nations that are primarily capitalistic are allied with nations which are primarily socialistic.

Moreover Capitalism is not monolithic or totalitarian and is combined with political institutions that encourage freedom of criticism. There are dangers from concentration of economic power under capitalistic auspices, but they are of a different order from the dangers from Communism, because such power does not exclude contrary tendencies on the political and cultural level.

crimination in the minds of people in Asia and Africa. Imperialism has sometimes had a constructive side, to which justice is not always done by its critics, but that constructive side does not compensate for the economic exploitation and the racial arrogance that have aroused the deep resentment of subject peoples. Whatever the merits of the particular policies of any imperial power, this resentment is a great psychological and political force behind the revolution in Asia and Africa. Communism is able to take full advantage of this resentment and to assume the role of champion of the oppressed.

There is moral confusion here, because neither the oppressive aspects of Communism nor the positive values in the institutions of the western democratic nations are sufficiently noticed. But it would be wrong for churches and Christians in those western democratic nations to blame others for creating the moral confusion. They created it themselves in the days of their unchallenged power. They preserve it whenever today they put the interests of western colonial powers ahead of the preparation of dependent peoples for self-government and whenever their attitudes and policies are controlled by racial pride. But, wherever the responsibility lies for the origin of the moral confusion, churches and Christians in Asia and Africa have a responsibility to help their people to see beyond it.

One of the most important lessons which churches and Christians have learned from their experience in the ecumenical community is that their vision is distorted in some measure by the particular historical circumstances under which they live. Such distortion can best be corrected when Christians from all lands and from diverse circumstances listen to one another under the judgment and the promise of the Gospel.

TOWARD ACTION FOR THE RESPONSIBLE SOCIETY

The purpose of this ecumenical enquiry on *Christian Action in Society* is to extend the ecumenical consensus about the aims of Christians in dealing with the most se-

rious problems of modern society. This understanding we hope, will encourage Christians to work for the change of those characteristics of their community life which are a hindrance to the spirit of a responsible society.

What are the problems which require the attention of the churches today ? These vary between the nations and communities in which Christians live. But there are certain momentous social issues in our world which raise grave ethical concerns that ought to be emphasized.

The following are offered as specific suggestions for study under the theme of the Responsible Society :

1. The Christian Responsibility for Economic Life

Perhaps the area of greatest concern for Christians today is that of economic life. What philosophy underlies the economic system of the different countries ? What are the consequences of mass production and industrialism upon community life ? What problems are created in these communities by powerful groups like labour and capital ? What are the possibilities for avoiding the worst evils of both capitalism and collectivism ? What have the churches said in the past and what ought they to say today about such problems ?

2. The Christian Responsibility for the Security and the Welfare of People

In many countries of the world the most important problem to be considered is the dependence of great masses of people on the state for security in old age, unemployment, sickness and accident, etc. What is the need for state-promoted or state-subsidized social security programmes in the different countries ? What has been done and what should be done to provide minimal security needs ? How can this be provided without undermining the freedom and initiative of the individual ?

3. The Christian Responsibility for Community Life

We must consider also the problems which have arisen in community life today and for which Christians bear a large responsibility. We need to study especially the problem of the modern community as it is divided into social

classes. What is the burden of these class divisions upon the individual and the community ? How is the life of the church affected by class stratification ? And how can the churches help to remove these divisions ?

4. The Christian Responsibility for Political and Spiritual Freedom

Some of the most serious question facing Christians today are in this realm. What, for instance, is the responsibility of the Church and of individual Christians to protect the rights of minority groups, for opposing totalitarian tendencies in the nation, or for maintaining the freedom of such instruments of mass communication as the radio, the press and the whole educational system from a centralised political control ? All of these problems and many others challenge the Christian to new efforts of social responsibility.

In the first stage of the enquiry the emphasis should be upon selecting and defining the problem, investigating the subject and securing the necessary information. This preliminary analysis should provide the basis for a discussion of the ethical aspects of the problem and a study of what Christians *ought* to say about it. The results of this group work will be circulated and exchanged in order to evaluate it in the light of the results obtained by other study groups.

In all these efforts, there must be serious consideration of the ways in which the conclusions can be implemented in Christian social action. There are of course great dangers and risks involved when Christians prepare to act on social problems. The greatest difficulty is that there will be those who will misinterpret our Christian concern and assume that we seek to identify the Church with a political group. Others may become over-optimistic about the success of a particular strategy and lose all sense of humility in evaluating its real importance. But it is necessary to take these risks to realize our social responsibility, since the dangers of too little concern are even greater. What is needed above all therefore is real study of the problems by local groups and a willingness to bear the responsibilities of making political and economic decisions which seem to support our Christian beliefs.

EXCERPT FROM THE REPORT OF SECTION III

Amsterdam Assembly, 1948

Economic and Political Organisation

...In the industrial revolution economic activity was freed from previous social controls and outgrew its modest place in human life. It created the vast network of financial, commercial and industrial relations which we know as the capitalist order. In all parts of the world new controls have in various degrees been put upon the free play of economic forces, but there are economic necessities which no political system can afford to defy. In our days, for instance, the need for stability in the value of money, for creation of capital and for incentives in production, is inescapable and world wide. Justice, however, demands that economic activities be subordinated to social ends. It is intolerable that vast millions of people be exposed to insecurity, hunger and frustration by periodic inflation or depression.

The Church cannot resolve the debate between those who feel that the primary solution is to socialise the means of production, and those who fear that such a course will merely lead to new and inordinate combinations of political and economic power, culminating finally in an omnicompetent State. In the light of the Christian understanding of man we must, however, say to the advocates of socialisation that the institution of property is not the root of the corruption of human nature. We must equally say to the defenders of existing property relations that ownership is not an unconditional right ; it must, therefore, be preserved, curtailed or distributed in accordance with the requirements of justice.

On the one hand, we must vindicate the supremacy of persons over purely technical considerations by subordinating all economic processes and cherished rights to the needs of the community as a whole. On the other hand, we must preserve the possibility of a satisfying life for « little men in big societies ». We must prevent abuse of authority and keep open as wide a sphere as possible in which men can have direct and responsible relations with each other as persons.

Coherent and purposeful ordering of society has now become a major necessity. Here governments have responsibilities which they must not shirk. But centres of initiative in economic life must be so encouraged as to avoid placing too great a burden upon centralised judgment and decision. To achieve religious, cultural, economic, social and other ends it is of vital importance that society should have a rich variety of smaller forms of community, in local government, within industrial

organisations, including trade unions, through the development of public corporations and through voluntary associations. By such means it is possible to prevent an undue centralisation of power in modern technically organised communities, and thus escape the perils of tyranny while avoiding the dangers of anarchy.

The Responsible Society

Man is created and called to be a free being, responsible to God and his neighbour. Any tendencies in State and society depriving man of the possibility of acting responsibly are a denial of God's intention for man and His work of salvation. A responsible society is one where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order, and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and the people whose welfare is affected by it.

Man must never be made a mere means for political or economic ends. Man is not made for the State, but the State for man. Man is not made for production, but production for man. For a society to be responsible under modern conditions it is required that the people have freedom to control, to criticise and to change their governments, that power be made responsible by law and tradition, and be distributed as widely as possible through the whole community. It is required that economic justice and provision of equality of opportunity be established for all the members of society.

We therefore condemn :

1. Any attempt to limit the freedom of the Church to witness to its Lord and His design for mankind and any attempt to impair the freedom of men to obey God and to act according to conscience, for those freedoms are implied in man's responsibility before God ;

2. Any denial to man of an opportunity to participate in the shaping of society, for this is a duty implied in man's responsibility towards his neighbour ;

3. Any attempt to prevent men from learning and spreading the truth.

Communism and Capitalism

Christians should ask why communism in its modern totalitarian form makes so strong an appeal to great masses of people in many parts of the world. They should recognise the hand of God in the revolt of multitudes against injustice that gives communism much of its strength. They should seek to recapture for the Church the original Christian solidarity with the world's distressed people, not to curb their aspirations towards justice, but, on the contrary, to go beyond them and

direct them towards the only road which does not lead to a blank wall, obedience to God's will and His justice. Christians should realise that for many, especially for many young men and women, communism seems to stand for a vision of human equality and universal brotherhood for which they were prepared by Christian influences. Christians who are beneficiaries of capitalism should try to see the world as it appears to many who know themselves excluded from its privileges and who see in communism a means of deliverance from poverty and insecurity. All should understand that the proclamation of racial equality by communists and their support of the cause of colonial peoples makes a strong appeal to the populations of Asia and Africa and to racial minorities elsewhere. It is a great human tragedy that so much that is good in the motives and aspirations of many communists and of those whose sympathies they win has been transformed into a force that engenders new forms of injustice and oppression, and that what is true in communist criticism should be used to give convincing power to untrustworthy propaganda.

Christians should recognise with contrition that many churches are involved in the forms of economic injustice and racial discrimination which have created the conditions favourable to the growth of communism, and that the atheism and the antireligious teaching of communism are in part a reaction to the chequered record of a professedly Christian society. It is one of the most fateful facts in modern history that often the working classes, including tenant farmers, came to believe that the churches were against them or indifferent to their plight. Christians should realise that the Church has often failed to offer to its youth the appeal that can evoke a disciplined, purposeful and sacrificial response, and that in this respect communism has for many filled a moral and psychological vacuum.

The points of conflict between Christianity and the atheistic Marxian communism of our day are as follows: (1) the communist promise of what amounts to a complete redemption of man in history ; (2) the belief that a particular class by virtue of its rôle as the bearer of a new order is free from the sins and ambiguities that Christians believe to be characteristic of all human existence ; (3) the materialistic and deterministic teachings, however they may be qualified, that are incompatible with belief in God and with the Christian view of man as a person, made in God's image and responsible to Him ; (4) the ruthless methods of communists in dealing with their opponents; (5) the demand of the party on its members for an exclusive and unqualified loyalty which belongs only to God, and the coercive policies of communist dictatorship in controlling every aspect of life.

The Church should seek to resist the extension of any system that not only includes oppressive elements but fails to provide any means by which the victims of oppression may

criticise or act to correct it. It is a part of the mission of the Church to raise its voice of protest wherever men are the victims of terror, wherever they are denied such fundamental human rights as the right to be secure against arbitrary arrest, and wherever governments use torture and cruel punishments to intimidate consciences of men.

The Church should make clear that there are conflicts between Christianity and capitalism. The developments of capitalism vary from country to country, and often the exploitation of the workers that was characteristic of early capitalism has been corrected in considerable measure by the influence of trade unions, social legislation and responsible management. But (1) capitalism tends to subordinate what should be the primary task of any economy—the meeting of human needs—to the economic advantages of those who have most power over its institutions. (2) It tends to produce serious inequalities. (3) It has developed a practical form of materialism in western nations in spite of their Christian background, for it has placed the greatest emphasis upon success in making money. (4) It has also kept the people of capitalist countries subject to a kind of fate which has taken the form of such social catastrophes as mass unemployment.

The Christian churches should reject the ideologies of both communism and laissez-faire capitalism, and should seek to draw men away from the false assumption that these extremes are the only alternatives. Each has made promises which it could not redeem. Communist ideology puts the emphasis upon economic justice, and promises that freedom will come automatically after the completion of the revolution. Capitalism puts the emphasis upon freedom, and promises that justice will follow as a by-product of free enterprise ; that, too, is an ideology which has been proved false. It is the responsibility of Christians to seek new, creative solutions which never allow either justice or freedom to destroy the other...

ECUMENICAL STUDY PAMPHLETS ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Christian Action in Society — The Responsible Society-The Meaning of Work (available January 1950)

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